

The background of the cover is a dark, atmospheric illustration. In the center, a man in a dark top hat and a long, dark coat stands with his back to the viewer, looking towards a large, ornate clock face. The clock face is part of a larger steampunk-themed background featuring various gears, mechanical parts, and a large, glowing, ethereal face in the upper center. The man is holding a small, glowing object in his right hand. The scene is flanked by tall, dark bookshelves filled with books. The overall color palette is dark, with shades of brown, black, and a hint of blue/grey, creating a mysterious and industrial feel.

# THE ABDUCTION OF SIR JOHN SHERIDAN

AN UNFATHOMABLE NOVELLA

Erfan Rezaei

## THE ABDUCTION OF SIR JOHN SHERIDAN

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## Chapter I

Sir John Sheridan, a fine figure of a man, had completed his morning rituals behind a well-varnished mahogany dresser and in front of an oval gold-rimmed mirror that glittered as the fine beams of the early amber sun thrust through the half-drawn curtains of his bedroom. He had dressed his moustache with a pair of short-bladed silver scissors in the seclusion and silence of his isolated lodging. With this routine, he created his everyday noble physiognomy of regular sanguine features.

It often took him about an hour in the mornings to prepare for his departure from his rural Jacobean mansion, an edifice of wood in the east exit of Vauxhall Gardens, and to set off in his roadster to make an appearance at The Ivory Club. He called these, his ‘wearying routines’. When he returns in the evening, it takes him just a few minutes to take off his hard-wearing cashmere frock suit and other admirable matching accessories.

Amongst all these valuable accessories, including Swiss golden pocket watches, silver emblems, and pearly tiepins and buttons, which were mostly his old-fashioned heirlooms, his bulbous-headed cane was the boldest sign of his dignity and calm determination as he walked through Piccadilly to Hyde Park. It was a reassuring solid, well-polished piece of ebony with a hawk head and a drawing of a pelican and an eagle engraved upon a silver ring around its upper neck. Sir John always betrayed remorse about being unconscious of its origin, but he knew it was a peculiar charming heritage from his ancestor, Baron James Sheridan. It was the best sign of an ambitious member of the landed gentry in his late sixties who was a liberal who led a life of luxury and credit.

He had got enough arrogance and egotism to spend long hours in the exclusive London clubs in order to receive the respect and admiration that such venues brought. But, he was demagogically amiable and benevolent in both dialect and gesture when speaking with others—whether they were from the working, middle or upper classes.

“Beg your pardon, sir. Your roadster is ready.” Pickens, his only servant, some twenty years younger, broke the silence.

“I am in a rush, Pickens. No chance to taste rashers today,” Sir John raised his voice slightly to be heard over the eight chimes of the big clock downstairs.

He picked up his stick, and stood, said, “An appointment, Pickens. I am getting ready for the next election to the House of Commons. Don’t forget to

vote for me.”

London political face, in the early spring of 1880, was to be reminded of how conservatism destined for false foreign policies was vehemently attacked by Liberals.

The Ivory Club was famous neither for its stingy members nor for its lavish ones, and neither for its monopolistic attitudes nor for its convergent opinions. It was neither like White’s nor like Brook’s. It wasn’t even a place of party members or scientific minds—unless you counted Sir John, who was an arch-politician. In spite of the fact that Sir John had become a new candidate of the party, the club was not still related to any of the newly sprung up bourgeoisies which had been created by the Industrial Revolution and which had money to spend on reformist policies against solid conservatism or absolute monarchy. In fact, it was famous instead for its acquisition of remarkable collections and museum pieces. These had been gathered by English pioneers who had explored India and Africa in previous centuries; pioneers who were the fathers of many of the contemporary owners of the pieces.

Among all decorative displays and elegant ornaments, a small coffin, about five feet long, laid on the red-carpeted floor in the middle of the hall. It caught every visitor’s eye with its totemic devotional signs and its carvings of unknown creatures—most likely presented to be either a bizarre tribal idol or a gift from the gods of Shona in Africa. The door was always open and the coffin was empty. And there used to be a key which penetrated the heart of its lockable door like Excalibur in the stone—a very long, thick, rusty red-coloured master key, which was stolen.

The coffin was a highly prized antique, gifted in 1625 by Baron James Sheridan to this isolationist society of science and philosophy in London from the vague world of Shona speakers. He had been the founding father of The Ivory Club, as well as a peripatetic merchant of ivory, gold, spices and fur in British Crown colonies—from the northern sandy borders of the Gibraltarian peninsula to the eastern coasts of the Bay of Bengal—until the mid-1630s when he died, middle-aged and far from home, of malaria. Indeed, he was the great-great-grandfather of Sir John, now the only surviving kinsman of Baron James Sheridan and the heir apparent of a great family fortune.

Baron Sheridan had been the master of Irish seafaring captains and the biggest wolfhound among packs of known sea dogs in the Elizabethan seas—he was well-reputed to be the conqueror of howling gales and stormy oceans rather

than a reliable servant of his queen. If Gainsborough had painted his portrait, it would have exhibited his weather-beaten face and piercing eyes, and he would be wearing a dingy coat and frayed neckerchief. But Baron was even more than this; he was also a trade mastermind with talents for marketing new merchandise on the ivory trade route, and even off the beaten path, and for discovery of exotic African habitats. He was known as a friend of native tribes and an enemy of slave traffickers.

Baron Sheridan had also been famous for being a grand master of some hidden reformist fraternities in London and having opinions resembling those of Robert Fludd, his hermit friend. These were mostly confessed and revealed among London philosophical societies in 1618 through his published manifestos, which elicited many negative reactions from philosophers and thinkers who had grown tired of ecclesiastical dependence; although his ideas were simultaneously supported by some noteworthy people, including Sir Francis Bacon.

To a remarkable degree, Baron Sheridan was deeply influenced by Shakespeare and was also fond of impressionistic paintings. He had himself created some mysterious paintings about cannibalism. Some of his close contacts made the most bloodcurdling interpretations of these—of their relationship to the Book of Revelation by Johannes.

Baron Sheridan's deviant attitude and enigmatic character, in comparison with all seamen of his time, struck a pose of mystery and unanswered questions within the society of philosophy and science. His biography held a dark fascination to those from all walks of life, discussed as it was from the common taverns to the palace. Nevertheless, the tragic death of both Sheridan and his grandchildren, which happened far from home while they were travelling, was enough to persuade Sir John to stay permanently in London and avoid even visiting docks or harbours to see his friends off—particularly after he passed the age of fifty.

Many white-bearded men with well-shaped features—the very mirror of Sheridan himself—were seated in their armchairs, calm and phlegmatic, as if they had been there for thousands of years.

Sir John Sheridan passed the empty tables set around the hall of The Ivory Club to reach Doctor William Lawrence, who was perched on the corner of his favourite settee near the fireplace.

Doctor Lawrence was a white-bearded man with a practical, scientific



mind and a face that bore the marks of apoplexy. He was a new member of the club and a new friend of Sheridan too, so the information about his past was what he told the others. For example, he had said that he had been brought up in the West End of London in the aristocratic family of Lawrence.

He was about sixty years of age and still deeply interested in chemistry, astronomy, alchemy and parapsychology rather than playing politics or cards at the clubs. He was eager in new theories, but hardly ever appeared successful in the academic debates in universities.

He had a lasting lethargic mitral vein and suffered from sudden attacks of hypostatic carotid, two malignant heart disorders which were concealed behind his steady stare and frigid eyes. He also had some experimental knowledge in hypnotism and necromancy which he claimed of the divine apparition of past souls in him, and he had an intuitive sense of foretelling the future. He stood noble in comparison with the other physicians of Bethlem Royal Hospital even though it was less than a year since he had started his job there.

Doctor Lawrence was alone, poking the blaze intently and taking no notice at all of his calm surroundings.

“As I promised, my dear fellow—early on Wednesday morning,” Sheridan said with a smile. “Today is the tenth day of March, and there are just three weeks left to the first contest. It remains to be seen who will gain the majority of seats; Liberals or Conservatives,” Sir John Sheridan said.

“A balloon, my dear friend—a balloon! What do you make of it?” Doctor Lawrence shouted eagerly.

“You have finally made up your mind, then. A balloon, William? Be warned—they might make a joke of it rather than admiring and applauding it as you wish them to. We needn’t show the extremes of our extravagance, anyhow,” Sir John answered with knitted eyebrows and a hint of fiery temper.

“Demonstration is the only ace in our hands, my dear John. We aren’t boasting our theoretical possibilities, but in fact we are going to demonstrate our attitude of creating a better life for everyone, to introduce a new world of science, to demonstrate ascending technology and—”

“But I believe this doesn’t work very well and they will make fools of us!” Sir John interrupted. “If you imagine I’ll have flown in the basket by the end of my speech, you must believe that pigs might fly that day too!” he

grumbled. "I must have been consulted with a politician rather than a scientist!" he murmured to himself as an afterthought.

Doctor Lawrence, acquainted with such sudden remonstrance from his old friend, started fancifully narrating his notions. His Belgian friend, the best balloonist in Belgium, was the person in charge of leading the demonstrative festivity of a manned balloon flight. He had no doubt that it would be a roaring success after delivery of a rousing speech and penetrative remarks supported by a real example. This would increase powers of persuasion among the audience as well as wielding influence within the party.

"Halloa! You have planned everything without consulting me about this buffoonery! How on earth will he manage the flight while I am a naive aeronaut?" Sheridan asked with a piercing gaze.

"My Belgian friend is an expert who knows how to pilot his aircraft both in pressed and outer space. By the way, he is using another gas—hydrogen instead of hot air to avoid ponderous dimensions and makes it more applicable." He was trying to convince Sir John to accept navigation by his own, when a younger member, made of sterner stuff than them, arrived and regarded the two others cautiously.

Mr Franklin was a treasurer in the East India Company with a tangled mind in digits and math. He was about fifty years old, and in the Sheridan's word 'the man of office'. There should have been years he hadn't have any dilemma, just bankruptcies and liquidated loans, but he was deeply interested in reaching the heart of any adventure as he had never been in, inasmuch as his nerves tingled easily with a sense of mystery when his friends hailed his yearning in this regard.

"Do you propose such an enterprise as a balloon, sir?" Sir John Sheridan asked him imperiously and without any preface, coming upon the direct line from the aerostatic theory.

"Hiring a balloon needs a great deal of money and requires a sterling cheque, but I need some time to think it through—I don't want to take any instant notion to pose to my colleagues," he answered incisively and continued with a lambent wit, "Anyway, I don't expect this conversation to drag on for hours; I am sure that Doctor Lawrence's ability to convince his stubborn friend is an undeniable fact."

"So we have yet to think it over. I tremble to think what will happen when



we come up with our final decision—either ignoring this noble suggestion or forcing me to go through with it despite the danger,” Sir John said with a crackling voice.

All the breakfast tables and silver teapots had been cleared away by ten o’clock, by which time *The Times* had arrived and was being delivered to the tables. It was cold and wet out-door and the lucid sun casted a narrow glow which was shimmering through the stained glass of the heavy mullioned windows and was brightening the hall spectral enough to invite all members to stay in for in-door gaiety and any further exercise was out of the question.

The Ivory Club’s members were well-reputed for playing cards and also for holding chess tournaments. Before lunch, the main round-tables were encircled by card players. Sir John Sheridan had his quivering finger tips pressed together and was leaning back in his armchair. Mr Franklin shuffled the cards thoroughly before dealing. Doctor Lawrence was deep in thought, conjuring up a good excuse to retreat from the table.

Doctor Lawrence, having no interest in playing cards, left the table of his companions very early—his visage coldly expressive with pale splashes of rage. He grabbed his coat and, in a last-ditch attempt to save his friend’s candidature from electoral defeat, said, “The methodology of being a public figure leads me to suggest such a performance, sir; and you may concede the point unless you convince yourself to act it out.”

Then he left in high dudgeon, meandering around the tables until the door was finally shut behind his last step.

“I think our old friend is really persisting in his suggestion. We must make up a good excuse immediately to avoid repetition of his last catastrophic ideas like his speech in the London institution about feasibility of time travel or other foolish subjects”, Sir John said.

“I disagree, dear John,” Franklin replied. “The opposing parties will never be able to compete against this mere propaganda exercise and will be respectful towards the large amount of charity funds collected at the end of the air show by our candidate. Irrespective of any perilous incidents, I believe in the power of the press. Many reports will have been scattered in Mayfair on the same evening papers that occur to you.”

Sheridan breathed heavily and smiled reassuringly. “My attitude towards Doctor Lawrence is that despite his manifold failure in proving his paranormal

theories, he is still as strong a theorist of the untouched universe as I am a good rhetorician of the unfeigned universe. I don't know him much, I admit but I accept his offer. Please write to the bank for a loan," he said.

## Chapter II

The Grand Balloon Ascent, by permission and under the immediate patronage of the Magistrates and a committee of gentlemen, was to be held in Vauxhall Gardens. All the arrangements for this extraordinary novelty, which had cost the earth in terms of preparations, were made absolutely ready the night before.

An oval balloon—made of a strong silk, coated with gutta-percha as proof against corrosive aero substances, and recently brought from Belgium—was firmly anchored on a platform; the southward wind causing only minor movement. The balloon weighed about one thousand pounds. It was equipped with a one-man wooden basket, awnings, anchors and sand ballasts, navigator apparatus, and heating instruments. It was slightly smaller than the legendary balloon of Mr Charles Green.

The halcyon sunshine of the genial spring weather called the spectators to the grounds. There was no sight of the political faces who had been invited, but some of the finest journalists in London were among the spectators, taking photos and making clouds of smoke, and of course Sir John's best friends including: Doctor Lawrence and his friend Lady Somerset, Mr Franklin from the East India Company, and a young lady, Miss O'Brien—who had glued herself to Sheridan's side.

O'Brien was in her late thirties and unmarried. She was short in stature, and thoroughly clad in black—wearing a simple, high-waisted dress of thin black muslin, long-sleeved, and a black turban too. She seemed to be a nun, or at least a member of a catholic sorority. Her accent revealed that she had grown up in Ireland.

Her vague acquaintance with people at The Ivory Club was rather confined to some short visits to Sir John Sheridan at the club's doorstep. As a female, she was not generally entitled to access to close-knit fraternities like The Ivory Club.

"Who is that girl close to John?" Doctor Lawrence asked Franklin whom was worried about his cheque clearing on time

"I saw her yesterday morning at the club's door, waiting to visit John!" Franklin replied. "I suppose a friend, or even a far relative."

Sheridan had planned for the force of hydrogen gas, instead of common air, to make the ascent, and for the balloon to reach an altitude of only eighty

feet. This seemed enough for a novice to demonstrate in front of at least five hundred pairs of eyes.

His inspiring speech, delivered from a basket that would very soon be floating in the air above the immense crowd, was regularly interrupted by vehement applause and tremendous cheering. Attired in a balloonist's jacket (the first politician to be seen in such clothes), Sheridan sent a wave of anticipation through the audience as his words echoed round the square.

"Tomorrow," he called out, "Great Britain shall remember her sons—sons of decisiveness and determination, who step towards a new land of maturity and understanding. She will honour her sons, those who beat a path through unknown worlds to mature faster than at any time before!"

It was time for him to accomplish the hard part of his show by raising the balloon over the hats of the visitors, and then landing it on the platform again in less than an hour.

There was a winch screwed into the ground, through which passed a rope which was tied at one extremity to the basket to fix the equilibrium of the balloon. If the balloon drifted dangerously close to the nearby buildings, Sheridan was to cut the rope and cause the balloon to ascend fifty feet higher.

The Belgian aeronaut cut off some ballasts to let the balloon rise. Sheridan was just trying to put into practice what he had studied during his short apprenticeship in working the control apparatus. Although his cold, shaking fingers were hard to control, he was headstrong enough to attempt the task without assistance. There was no sign of stage fright in his face; he was enjoying the performance. The operation started, and Sheridan pulled the lever.

"Let's fly!" he shouted.

Sheridan was nervous, but preoccupied with inflating the balloon by heating the hydrogen to 180 degrees, which he knew should result in the balloon rising to, and then remaining at, an altitude of 200 feet. The balloon rose gently into the air to the expected height. The crowd stirred with excitement.

Everything seemed to be under control; even the winch operated with no pressure from dragging gusts of wind. People indulged their enthusiasm with waving hands, thrown hats, and shrill shouts. The basket appeared to grow smaller and smaller as it rose higher. With some misgivings, Sheridan raised the balloon 200 more feet. An altitude of 400 feet was higher than he had been

recommended to go, and more dangerous; an inexperienced midshipman like Sheridan might struggle to control the balloon against the wind at such a height.

Mr Franklin turned to Doctor Lawrence. "That was amazing!" he said with a smile. "I think the election will go right down to the wire now!"

At this moment, another balloon appeared, travelling impetuously into square at higher altitude and floating near Sheridan's. Watching this interference, Sheridan's friends from The Ivory Club guessed that an obstructive plan by rivals was underway. But when this second balloon moved closer to the crowd, they realised that it didn't look exactly like a balloon after all. There were no signs of a basket suspended from it, and even the shape of it was more like a disc than a sphere. It moved much more quickly than Sheridan's balloon, and rays of multi-coloured light filtered through its upper half.

All the shocked visitors turned their heads towards the Belgian balloonist, who immediately started turning the handle of the winch, applying gears and levers to force the balloon to descend. In French, he shouted instructions to Sheridan for how to help him land the vessel, but there was no reply.

The disc spun round the balloon in a violent whirl, causing consternation in the audience. It then left the area at a high velocity and disappeared into the ether. Two burly men ran to help the Belgian balloonist pull the basket down. It took about a quarter of an hour to descend, due to the force of the wind.

Mr Franklin, who was cautiously supervising the recovery of the balloon in anticipation of finding Sheridan healthy, but was more anxious for his cheque than his friend's health, moved closer to see the platform. To his surprise, he found the basket empty and his friend gone. A crowd of about fifty men began to circle the basket in a state of shock and disbelief before several police constables ran over to disperse them.

"Pas de ma faute!" cried Sheridan's Belgian friend repeatedly. Lady Somerset and Doctor Lawrence left the scene immediately due to the latter's suddenly increased heart rate.

Franklin was stupefied and wandered through the electrified crowd with a puzzled frown on his face repeating the words, "Two thousand pounds, two thousand pounds!" to himself.

After some minutes, he found himself being swept along by a terrified, running crowd. Miss O'Brien grabbed Mr Franklin's cold and shaking hand. She

had to shout in his ear to be heard.

“Sir, I think he must have flown away with that unidentified object, mustn’t he?” Miss O’Brien asked Franklin.

“I don’t know what happened. Perhaps he is ... oh, John—you have made us so bewildered!” Mr Franklin answered in a dazed manner.

The visitors scattered, but a few, including the performance committee and Sheridan’s friends from The Ivory Club, were messing about. Mr Franklin was hoping to solve the riddle of their friend who had disappeared, but it soon became obvious that the case was supernatural.

A peeler from Scotland Yard arrived and soon was very busy noting every trivial occurrence in detail, querying people who had participated in the ballooning performance and Mr Franklin as well. Franklin introduced himself and spoke about the incident in detail and gave his own opinion that the events were part of a devilish plan on the part of the opposing party.

“Sir John must have been kidnapped by mercenaries from the opposing party. They must have found more modern flying devices,” Franklin said, trying to convince the police, and added, “I dare say, sir, that Sheridan was right about the foolishness of such a gamble.”

O’Brien interrupted his monologue and her intriguing remarks attracted the attention of the police. She began mulling over the rudiments of the tragedy in her own mind, reviewing the events somewhat imprudently, in the view of the police, and theorising about some paranormal events.

“You don’t seem to comprehend the scale of these events, sir,” she said with reckless defiance. Her words brought a warm flush to her face. “That flying object couldn’t have been made by humans. I suppose footprints of unknown creatures from the moon are visible—furthermore, the legendary carvings cut into the wooden coffin presented at The Ivory Club hold other clues to their existence and their intention to make a connection!”

“How do you know that?” Franklin exclaimed, but O’Brien said nothing, just stared.

“I need to know about your relationship with Sir John. Please trust me and let me know of this,” Franklin continued conversation.

“All right, the fact is I am employed by him to protect him!”

“So, you are in religious service having holidays and hunting ghosts?” Mr Franklin asked with a scornful smile. “What a joke. I can’t believe Sir John employed a nun for exorcism!”

“No, sir, not exorcism indeed. Please listen,” she retorted. “We need to investigate Sheridan’s mansion as the first step—even before police! I have been there several times in the past couple of weeks and visited his backyard without any sight of what he called ‘the people of the moon!’ He was madly engaged with his hearing problems!”

“What is any proof of your claim?”

“His servant’s testimony was recorded at the police station when they reported a burglary two months ago. However, their audible range was distorted, and the police didn’t find anyone in the backyard. They just try to hush the affairs up!”

“His butler? Pickens?”

“He used to be a butler, but now his only servant and waits on him hand and foot anywhere. I am assured he knows a lot about his master. I believe that there should be some thread of suspicion in his work because I noted his anxiety this morning. I suppose he would know some facts about those ‘people of the moon.’ Please let me assist you in this circumstance!”

Miss O’Brien seemed to have few formal graces, and her manner contrasted greatly with that of the taciturn men present—who replied in monosyllables and maintained an atmosphere of tranquillity and strict politeness—so Mr Franklin didn’t pay attention with kindness to her words.

“It seems you are more qualified than any other men of fraternity or police to fantasy about this case, but I should feel at liberty to avail myself of your companionship, shouldn’t I? But no, I don’t accept your help,” Mr Franklin said.

The burden of Sir John Sheridan’s disappearance not only shocked the party but also very soon circulated in the London evening papers, triggering an initial torrent of confusion and speculation followed by a sense of anti-climax—as if the end of a magic performance had been missed. A Gentleman’s Magazine’s reports the air show covering the incident referring to the abduction of Sir John Sheridan, and Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society came very close to O’Brien’s theory of ‘the people of the moon’.





### Chapter III

After sending redundant wires from his office in the City to the East India Company, in which he informed the board of directors of his intention to visit Sheridan's estate in Kennington Lane, he duly made his way there on a fast cab.

Many people suffered in poverty and depression right under the skin of prosperous, flourishing London. In fact, the British government and the Bank of England followed a severe deflationary policy had prolonged economic predicaments. The capital stock of the East India Company was invested in permanent government debt, on which the government paid regular interest. So networks concerning the East India Company and the Bank of England were arguing with the board of directors to reclaim two-thousand pounds cheque immediately.

Upon his arrival, he noted the charming Elizabethan knot garden of hedges and roses without arrangements for a week or two.

Pickens, the only servant and, currently, the only resident of the household, welcomed Mr Franklin with solemn and ushered him inside atrium. The mansion itself was luxurious, the main atrium possessing a hardwood floor and a high ceiling complete with period chandelier. It was well-furnished, lavishly decorated with fine mahogany and a collection of Belgian masterpieces from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Any guest mused that it would provide a fine reception hall for parties. A flight of shallow stairs led the eye to the first floor, which boasted an octagonal arrangement of rooms designed to showcase the fashionable architectural ideas of the old age. The various interiors and galleries were warmed and well-lit by ornate gas lighting fixtures.

To his surprise, he found Miss O'Brien reposing in an armchair, a glass of wine in her hand.

"I presumed you were a nun! What are you doing here?" he cried. "I told you, you haven't any business here. Please leave immediately, or I shall call the peeler!"

Mr Franklin turned to Pickens. "Why did you let her in?" he demanded.

Pickens smiled politely and cleared his throat. "Miss O'Brien is here at Sir John's request, sir."

“What request?”

Miss O’Brien said with a shaky voice while she was struggling to get to her feet. “You heard correctly, sir. I am here fulfilling my responsibilities, in accordance with Sir John’s request before his untimely disappearance. Perhaps you should accustom yourself to my companionship!”

“Why didn’t you tell me this yesterday?” Franklin said in anger.

“I did. I informed you about the people of the moon and Sir John’s request for my services.”

“All right, if you say so. Have you ever seen any ghosts here, Pickens?” Mr Franklin backed down very quickly.

“I have not, sir. But I have felt whispering in my ears, particularly after dark and in the garden.”

“Elaborate, Pickens. I need to know any strange circumstances in this house.”

Pickens’ response was unexpectedly detailed. “Until recently, Sir John preferred spending the twilight hours in his own company. Then, one night, a particular visit heightened his need for seclusion. A young gentleman appeared on the doorstep and demanded to see Sir John.

Sir John met his request and led him inside the studying room upstairs. Although I could not hear a single word they uttered, they had not been speaking for longer than half an hour, when I returned to the room for the service which I was rung for, only to sense an abysmal despair and frustration on the part of Sir John.”

“Why your master might seem despairing after visiting this gentleman?” Franklin asked.

“I presumed that the gentleman had brought news about the disappearance of Sir John’s ancestors. I only make this presumption because that is the matter which has been of greatest importance to Sir John in recent years. He yearned to learn how his father had demised overseas.”

After a moment, Pickens continued with this astonishing story as he was stunned himself. “Sir John asked me to show him out, after the gentleman with those frigid eyes had left and vanished into dark, I served Sir John his customary

bedtime tea. At that point, he declared that the gentleman in question had been his father!”

“His father, Sir Henry Sheridan?” Mr Franklin exclaimed. “He died over forty years ago, didn’t he?”

Pickens had difficulty in recalling it. “I heard of it, he vanished during his trip to Boston, where he had been invited by his friends at the Scottish Rite Lodge. I heard this from my father, who was Sir Henry Sheridan’s servant. Sir Henry Sheridan was a loyal servant of the crown but a master mason!”

Mr Franklin, however, appeared unconvinced.

“The visitor was a real man and not a ghost as O’Brien suggests! Is there anything else?”

“Nothing!”

“I noticed of the gardens are not arranged for a couple of weeks. Why?”

“An enormous swarm of bees disrupted our outdoor routines for several weeks!”

“How had Sir John been spending this time?”

“He was shut up in his study, and paid no attention whatsoever to the outside world.”

“Would you be so kind as to show us his study?” Franklin requested.

The party moved upstairs. Sheridan’s study was a big, book-lined room. Flickering candlelight encroached upon the dim corners of the study, and behind the wooden desk was a comfortable armchair. They could visualise Sir John Sheridan sitting at his desk, enjoying many peaceful hours alone.

Pickens left the two visitors to their deliberations. O’Brien seized upon his absence to take a pamphlet from the leather-topped desk. The cover showed a cross twined with climbing roses and flanked by fearsome creatures with small bodies, large heads and wide, staring eyes. Above them the sky was filled with flying devices. As O’Brien flicked through the pages she saw childlike, yet dreadful drawings of strange creatures, as well as dead animals, bloody rivers, and burning forests.

Mr Franklin stroked his beard and remarked, “The illustrations hints at the

dark imaginings of Sir John's troubled mind prior to his disappearance. What do you make of them?"

"The people of the moon!"

"So you persist on your theory again, don't you?"

The two unlikely companions browsed the books on the shelves which seemed to be more referred, only to realise that most of the titles were Latin or German and related to the history of the Knights Templar and the Teutonic Order. There were also astrological charts, numerous coats of arms, and genealogical tomes that dutifully recorded the ancestry of the English nobility. Taken as a whole, the collection tended to suggest that Sheridan had been preoccupied recently by his genealogy.

There was also a large old Zohar printed in Hebrew, in better condition than any of the other books. O'Brien grasped the book and examined it with interest.

"The Zohar is what I look for as an undoubted answer of old Cabbalistic perceptions, which describes the origin of evil and the role of man, but without stepping forward to the New Age of man's originality and evil's authority," she said.

"Are you Jewish?" Mr Franklin asked.

"No," O'Brien replied.

"Or related to one of the societies of the extraordinary movement? You interpret very well."

"Again, no. Sir John let me to use his study for some weeks instead of paying for my services. I can read in Latin."

"Services? You mean exorcism?"

O'Brien breathed heavily, paying no more interest to her companion, and then opened the book when a key fell out, clattering onto the floor.

"Yes! The lost key!" she shrieked.

"I found it!" She picked up the key, her eyes glittering.

Mr Franklin was astounded and asked, "What will it unlock?"

“It is the lost key of the coffin in The Ivory Club which had been stolen.”

“Why here? In Sheridan’s mansion?”

“I don’t know. I assume he found that there would have been some other coffins.”

“Anyhow it is not permitted to bring the club’s stuff outside,” Franklin retorted and then grabbed the key and put it inside his pocket.

“What would have been wrong with John?” Franklin murmured and then they left the study to explore the house for more evidences.

Walking through the dim halls, Franklin filled his pipe carefully with Cavendish tobacco and lit it as his companion permitted. He puffed away thoughtfully before speaking again and asked O’Brien, “So I have a nun beside me in this case.”

“I’m not a nun,” she said.

“I was fifteen when I moved straight from the orphanage to the nunnery that’s local to my birthplace in Dublin but I escaped. In fact I am a seeker of curious experience.”

“A seeker?” Mr Franklin exclaimed.

“Yes, I have read lots of religious and historical books you know in my life.”

On listening to this, Franklin seized the opportunity and pointed to the carvings on the doors which were almost a secret, and to elicit more of her knowledge. “Have a look, the drawings of a pelican on a cross—who feeds its young of its own blood, are engraved in different parts of this house. And the drawing of a pelican and an eagle as carved into Sheridan’s cane. I think there are ties between the Sheridan family and some sort of hidden fraternity. What do you make of these images?”

“It’s a symbol for Christ sacrificing ,but, of course, is of the symbols related to ‘*The Brotherhood of The Rosy Cross*’ as well,” O’Brien explained and added, “Sir John’s carved cane is undoubtedly a gift from the fraternity of *The Rosy Cross* in London.”

“What is your knowledge of this fraternity?”

“I just know that this order relates to reforms by Fr Christian Rosenkreutz’s mendicant friars, which deviated from the teachings of the main Church. He called for a universal reform. I think this order is what I see as footprints of modern mystical interpretation of the Scriptures. Society is currently undergoing major changes, and yet it lacks guidelines for its evolution.”

“I think these things are related: a coffin or coffins, abduction and Sir John Sheridan himself. Perhaps the contents of this study are signs of Sheridan’s association with *The Rosy Cross*,” Franklin concluded.

“But how do you refer them to the creatures who are the prime suspects of this case?” O’Brien asked.

“Aha!” exclaimed Franklin as an idea struck him.

“The best person to ask about Sheridan’s pamphlet, is Lady Somerset, whom we may visit at her gallery.”

“Is she a painter?”

“No; she is a collector of copies! Da Vinci fakes are just a small part of her vast assemblage.”

“Why do you think an appointment with her would be helpful?”

“I saw a painting at her gallery—depicting some dwarfs with elliptical heads and a shining moon. It was unsigned, but distinctly resembled what we saw in Sheridan’s pamphlet.”

“So, we shall visit her to learn more of the people of the moon! Shan’t we?”

“Yes. Of course. I suppose that painting and symbolism are a language to tell some facts.”

The puzzle had again been blown to smithereens by the evidence found in Sheridan’s study, and had made the circumstances appear even more multifaceted than before.

Mr Franklin was seized with a keen desire to know more about the relation between the coffins and the symbols of *The Rosy Cross* which now eclipsed the flying object. He was more fretful for his bank tribute than for his friend undeniably. He pondered, awestruck, on how his best friend—who had been well



renowned in the Liberal party too—was related to a shadowy fraternity.

He was also doubtful about his notorious colleague, and wondered why she was so curious about the case. What was her real motivation? She had introduced herself as Sheridan's employee, and now she was delving into the history of the people of the moon, and pursuing the clues of a mystery which had been abandoned as hopeless by police.

## Chapter IV

A week after the Parliament competitions finished, a majority of Liberals won the seats in Sheridan's lack. The Liberals secured one of their largest ever majorities in the election, leaving the Conservatives a distant second.

Franklin and O'Brien headed to a poor part of town. Miss O'Brien had red curly hair that was pulled into a bun at the base of her neck and seemed somewhat tired. Franklin didn't want to pry, but he couldn't ignore the bags under her eyes.

"Didn't get much sleep last night?" he asked as they weaved their way into town. There were people selling wares of every kind and the least money could be handed in from pockets to pockets.

O'Brien chuckled. "When do I ever sleep?"

The sun shone brightly over Lincoln's Inn Fields in the north conjunction of Chancery Lane where a set of Addison houses lay semi-detached, deplorable dwellings for many retired soldiers and shabby genteel. Amongst these muddy passages was the gallery of Lady Somerset that had a blind entrée only for special guests. Franklin and O'Brien stepped inside.

The opening of the door set a clanking bell ringing. Papering the walls of Lady Somerset's dismal galleria were copies of legendary pastel portraits and contemporary melodramatic landscapes on tanned papers, as well as worthy forges of histrionic De Vinci's chefs-d'oeuvre. Amongst them an oil on canvas paintings by an anonymous manqué took visitors' eyes—several dwarfs were standing, having big heads and oval dark eyes. The blackness of the background was very deep and the shining moon in the dark sky was the lightest part of the painting.

"To whom have I got the pleasure of speaking, young lady?" Lady Somerset shuffled over to them and regarded them as respectfully as she could. She looked to be in her early sixties. Her gait was wonky and her grey hair was worn in elaborate curls on both sides. She wore a dark brown gown with a wide buckled belt, full sleeves, and a black sheer collar with shell buttons.

Franklin introduced his companion and said the reason of their presence before asking about the painting. "Who is the painter of that painting?"

"Poor John," Lady Somerset said.

O'Brien thrust her hand into her purse, pulled out the pamphlet of the painting, and showed it to Lady Somerset.

"I think it is very similar to the painting that I have received as a gift from him. Perhaps he did some drafts before finishing the main work," Somerset guessed.

"Why such a strange one?" O'Brien asked.

Lady Somerset was silent for a space. "I know he was suffering from mental problems recently! He was cynical about travelling in that gigantic balloon too. Poor man! He was counselled to do such a devilish arrangement under the burden of his friends," she said and upheld an atmosphere of sorrow and distress.

Franklin gritted his teeth upon hearing Lady Somerset's words. He was one of Sheridan's friends who had planned the presentation, and guilt weighed heavily on his shoulders. He clenched his fists.

Quickly, Franklin changed the subject. The dialogue didn't refer to the ballooning episode at Vauxhall anymore, but, about collected footprints from *The Rosy Cross* and an elaborated tarnished key from Sheridan's manor—two clues that seemed to be broken threads. Curiously, however, they had also found a pamphlet of paintings.

"I have no idea what that flying saucer was, but about the actuality of the other coffins, yes, I admit."

"How many coffins are there? Would there have been more than two?"

"Yes, I suppose seven. They are presented to the different places, mostly churches or hospitals, by Baron Sheridan. For example, he gave one to my ancestor, who was a prominent physician of his time, another to The Ivory Club on Bond Street, others to the British Museum or churches that were soon burnt in the Great Fire. In fact, we had one buried in the backyard!"

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, that was a gift from Baron Sheridan to my great-great-grandfather about two centuries ago."

"Why such a gift? Was there anything interesting in the coffin?"

"Baron was a celebrated marine superior in his age and well known for his

travels to Africa. He could have used these coffins to ship sick people, I suppose, and my grand ancestor was a doctor who might have been required to cure the sick African child in the coffin!”

“A sick African child!” Franklin uttered.

“I don’t know why Baron would conduct such an experiment, but there was something odd with the sick children who all died after their arrival in London.”

“Please elaborate!”

“I heard a little of this from my mother before her death. When she was a child, there were odd fallouts in the ground where the African child had been buried. Trees had been yellowed for some inexplicable reason. Quite often, my family smelled something putrid in the backyard when the trees turned dry. She posited that the coffin had been badly decayed underground when her grandfather dug it up to burn the leftovers. She was able to recall a big skull—twice as large as an adult man’s head. It was egg-shaped with a pair of abnormally big eye sockets. I think that skull didn’t belong to any eminent race!”

“The head of Baphomet!” O’Brien yelled.

“The head of Baphomet?” Franklin looked befuddled.

O’Brien continued, “The skull shouldn’t have belonged to human as the disc which appeared in the Vauxhall Gardens with that shape and speed wasn’t a human-made one. The existence of creatures from other planets is a more plausible explanation and might reveal something about humanity’s genesis.”

“What happened to the skull?” Franklin turned to Lady Somerset.

“My grandfather would have been burnt it. There was something thought-provoking about the children—something that may cause extreme deviation in the narrow considerations of the Catholic Church, something about the origin of Adam, something about God!”

Lighting his pipe, Franklin took a seat. “So, you believe there was a link between African tribes and the people of the moon, don’t you?” he asked O’Brien.

“This is not just something I believe. These coffins are compelling enough pieces of evidence!” O’Brien responded.

“Well, well, well ... what do we have?! Shuffled pieces of a puzzle, a key, a coffin, an abductee and mysterious creatures, but something is missing! Why Sheridan?” Franklin muttered.

O’Brien observed, “I think you have discounted one more clue; the presence of Henry Sheridan after forty years without any traces of aging. It would be illuminating if we could be shown the same pattern for his sons, too! An epiphany!”

“So, Sheridan’s epiphany would be the latter question he might put to us after his mystifying disappearance,” Mr Franklin surprisingly retorted.

“Yes, Sir John, or even all of his ancestors!”

Lady Somerset opened a window to let in some fresh air, while Franklin converted half of his Cavendish tobacco into a dense smoke that weaved and suffused around the gallery. He was gazing intently at the painting.

Franklin murmured to himself with a stony look on his face before asserting, “We must learn more of John’s mental situation, and the best person to answer this is Doctor Lawrence!”

Franklin and O’Brien were both totally mystified with what the new clue—a mysterious skull—would have been. However, regardless of their respective and nebulous conclusions, O’Brien’s abridgments came up with more leniencies, as if she had anticipated such circumstances; she revealed linkage of the painting with the people of the moon and African tribes and with a prehistoric return—evidenced in the signs of the disclosed coffin presented in The Ivory Club. Now the question of the skull and its origin illuminated a new path before both inquirers; to query Doctor Lawrence in hopes of more verdicts about the poor abductee’s thoughts and beliefs.

Franklin and his colleague exempted Lady Somerset and left the gallery. Franklin gave his retinue a lift to Drury Lane where she was to retire at a rental room. In the cab, O’Brien repeated her last words that alluded to the existence of the people of the moon and considered the probability of acquaintance between Sheridan’s ancestors and these people and the use of coffins made by Baron Sheridan to ship samples from Africa.

Listening to these words repeated would make anyone else nervous, but Franklin returned to a congenial state of shrewdness along with this astute connoisseur.

## Chapter V

Accustomed to corresponding with the East India Company, Franklin penned a memorandum to the court of directors in which he appealed hastily for more consent in the date of flushing his cheque with remarks, and alluded in the letter that favoured the conjecture with these words.

10, May 1880

Dear Sirs,

I have been informed of a number of supernatural circumstances at the ballooning festivity at Vauxhall Royal Gardens last month. As these would certainly be implicated in Sir John Sheridan's abduction, and as I know that a selection of documents will be made in a few days, I beg leave to address you upon that subject.

Allow me now, sirs, to introduce Miss I. O'Brien, my colleague in this case, whose shrewdness helped me discover broken threads in the abduction case that is connected with an elapsed hidden reform fraternity called '*The Rosy Cross*'.

I have made my application formally in writing to Joseph Dart, Esq., the honoured invigilator of the company to renew my lease. However, as I am so little known to the fraternity of *The Rosy Cross*, I hope to be excused for pressing your solicitations and thus be retained as momentarily as possible, as we should be applying police or detectives to retrieve the poor abductee. The matter of my best friend's life is my primary concern; further to this, I offer an apology on this occasion and beg that you provide me to return the asset on ballooning arrangements.

I fear much of this letter may have the appearance of a want of delicacy in me, but I must plead as an apology the importance, to me, of the subject, and my being to the executive representative so much a stranger. I have the honour to be, with great respect and esteem, your obedient servant.

A. Franklin

The next morning, Franklin and his new friend met each other at Doctor

Lawrence's doorstep on Old Bailey street. After having a visit from Somerset Galleria, Franklin was feeling he is convicted both figuratively and literally in this dilemma with Sheridan's friends and must retrieve more clues to a plea. He also learnt more by his new companion about the supernatural potentials in the case.

Now they were going to query Sheridan's psychologist about any emotional condition of him lately or even more about his believes.

Before entering the house, O'Brien requested Franklin not to interrupt her with any distracting questions, while she interrogated Doctor Lawrence. Franklin entirely understood that it was going to help her and he promised to keep the silence.

An old Indian housemaid opened the door who spoke a little English. The atmosphere of the house was too rarefied, cold and dimly lit. The hall was cramped and fully occupied with figurines of antique gods from China, India and Africa. It seemed like Lawrence should have had a very long life before collecting such a collection.

They strolled over and noticed of a door with a dark brass plate says "33".

"What does it mean? Where are the other rooms marked before 33?" Franklin asked.

"It isn't a number of a room. It's a Masonic sign, I reckon," O'Brien retorted instantly. Then they knocked on the door and entered by permission. Doctor Lawrence wore a long black frock suit made of a sumptuous fabric; when his visitors entered, they saw him roaming around the room with his hands behind his back.

Mr Franklin introduced his companion, as she was unknown to Doctor Lawrence.

"Welcome. I saw you at the ballooning festival. You were standing near to Sir John Sheridan, but there was no opportunity to greet you," Doctor Lawrence said to Miss O'Brien. They shook hands.

The visitors began to discuss what they had ascertained about the case so far—specifically about Sheridan and the coffins from Africa.

Mr Franklin said that their query from Lady Somerset notified them of the existence of beings whose bulks were being conveyed from Africa to England



for some ambiguous purpose.

“Yes, I know!” Doctor Lawrence exclaimed, continuing, “You’ve killed your time to know more about those cursed skulls.”

“How do you know that?” O’Brien asked.

“This anecdote is famous in the family history and most of his friends know this.”

“What do you know of those skulls?”

“Don’t bother yourself about that. The fact is that the African Shona tribes may have wanted Baron Sheridan to aid their ill children, moving them to an urban clinic. But they all died during the voyage. That’s all.”

“I don’t believe so,” O’Brien explained. “I don’t know much more than you do, but I think the skull to which Lady Somerset referred would be the Head of Baphomet!”

O’Brien described the memory of times when she had access to Sheridan’s excellent library. She added, “I knew something was striking about what Sir John himself had divulged. I knew about the people of the moon before Sheridan dismisses.”

The discussions ventured over questions of great depth without steering away from the subject. O’Brien had noticed the ring on Doctor Lawrence’s finger. She realised it had the sign of a pelican and an eagle. “I have seen the same ring on Sir John’s finger. Is there any relationship between the two of you, other than that of patient and doctor?” she asked Doctor Lawrence.

“No, he was just my patient.”

“Sir John’s servant informed us that he was extremely disheartened of late. Do you admit to it?” O’Brien asked.

“I am not allowed to disclose my patient’s secrets,” Lawrence replied cold-bloodedly.

The method of O’Brien’s interrogations and questions implied presupposed answers. So, her questions were either dodged or evaded. In general, her efforts were to no avail, and Doctor Lawrence’s equivocal responses did nothing to dampen her speculations, however, they did manage to magnify O’Brien’s resolve and she continued to press further.

“Are you a Rosicrucian?” O’Brien asked without a preface.

“Asking me that question is enough. What exactly are you looking for Franklin? Why are you quiet? Who is this lady? An inquisitor?” Doctor Lawrence questioned in rage.

“The best conclusion is that Sir John actively participated in occult activities and eventually, these paranormal forces got the best of him. This weighed in on his mind, and behaviour and it is the reason why he needed me to protect him. He wanted to be safe from the atypical forces surrounding him.

“He also knew that these coffins were meant to deliver some people of the moon and not children from other continents to England. This revelation has an eerie quality to it and has inspired countless fictitious stories of alien encounters. It is often lauded as one of the strongest pieces of evidence in favour of the fact that we are not alone in the universe,” O’Brien theorized and continued, “We found paintings in Sheridan’s house with vivid images of the people of the moon. This proves that he knew something about them or may have even been associated with them, or knew how to contact them. Even his family would have been in the same situation, as after forty years, his father’s epiphany is proofing the possibility of Sir John Sheridan’s return.

“Generally, we are all star seed creatures like Sheridan—crossbreeds of the people of the moon exiled from Eden to the sanctuary of moon—who carry the codes of our space traveller ancestors in our blood. Codes of eternity and codes of being from that bloody heaven. We are exiled. We are lost and we must return to our origins.

“And you doctor, you have concealed something under your false name, your false identity! You know more about *The Rosy Cross* and the people of the moon.”

Doctor Lawrence’s weak heart began to beat faster when he heard those words, and he knitted his brows. He stood up, breathed deeply and replied, “So, you bloody blasphemer, you aren’t the biological child of your parents too, are you!?”

Doctor Lawrence was a powder keg, perilous and taunt, and Franklin felt wretched watching the argument. O’Brien blushed scarlet at the answer and left the house in frustration and wrath.

Lawrence poured some wine with shaking hands and replied, “I tell you,

Franklin; be cautious with this awkward girl! She is more than a private detective!”

Franklin laughed, “What a showdown!” Then he ran on to the street after O’Brien. He grasped her hand, “I must know everything right away. Please tell me now. Tell me who you are and why do you believe Doctor Lawrence is using a fake name?”

“All right, I shall tell you. But if you want answers you will have to come to this address tomorrow, in the evening. You are invited to a private show!” She said and passed a piece of crumbled map.

## Chapter VI

With a sense of foreboding, Franklin read the map. The address had been pointed on the scribbled paper with a sign of the cross—somewhere in Drury Lane near Covent Garden.

It was about seven o'clock in the evening of the next day when he dismounted on a long, eerie, cobbled passage where the cab couldn't go further. He found the house and entered, and O'Brien welcomed him.

The room was empty of furniture, save for some necessities for a night or two; including a single bed and two noisy seats. A white screen had been erected across a corner of the room. The atmosphere of the room was so stale that he could hardly breathe.

She insisted he take off his hat and have some wine. Franklin was glad to accept her hospitality; and he allowed himself to be relieved of his travelling garb just as passively as he had accepted her invitation.

Franklin was going to say how worried he was about the situation. For a full-time accountant who had been working behind a desk his entire life, this was an extraordinary breakthrough. Some questions were weaving in his head; who were the people from the moon, and why had Sheridan been abducted by them? But he limited himself to a neutral enquiry. "So you stay here at nights?"

"It hasn't been a long time since I moved here," O'Brien answered with a smile.

"Where were you before moving to London? It seems you're Irish, aren't you?"

"My father is a prominent Londoner but I was born in Dublin."

"So you have relatives here in London?"

"Yes, my father."

"Why did you stay in Dublin while your father was living here?"

"My story is a bit long."

"I am listening."

O'Brien took a deep breath and said, "I'm always reminded of my early childhood, when I was running behind my mother's fast steps, wearing ragged

shoes and carrying a dirty doll in my hand. It was a foggy day. I see it vividly. The road was leading down to the harbour, where my father left both of us alone, although I'm certain he knew we were there. Neither my mother, nor I had any reason to chase after him on board. We watched quietly until the liner was obscured by the shroud of the grey, sluggish skyline.

“In addition to this small memory, and a few clearer ones, I can recall my mother's image, too. She was sickly and gullible, poor and with no relatives in Dublin, and I had no way either to remain behind her or leave her. I also remember the houses where my mother went after midnight, just for a loaf of bread, rose-coloured blocks and lengthy walls and cheerful lamps and enormous gateways.

“It was better to be in foster care to get regular meals and have a warm place to stay than to follow her, so I decided to live alone. After finishing my sentence for some juvenile delinquency at the age of fifteen, I moved directly from the orphanage to the local nunnery of my birthplace in Dublin. Our matriarch was very religious and focused on me and my beliefs as well. I had to respect her foolish holy ideas. She always tried to prove humans were born evil and that the priest's obligation was to cleanse their devilish brains. I don't know why, but I see my mother's image every time I recall the matriarch's face. In my childish mind, the ways they lived and reasoned were the same. As a teenage girl, the world was very simple to define; in one word, nasty. There was no hope of better men or a better world, but I had lots of questions too, waiting for me to leave the convent to discover the real world, and not to be a copy of the matriarch or my mother. So I escaped the nunnery.

“I started where my story started, with my father. I found a ship like that liner my father had taken, and very soon I discovered he'd travelled to London. My destination was London. But this required money, and the easiest way for an eighteen-year-old girl to earn money was in a tavern. I slithered like a pig in the filth of this nasty world for one shilling a night, just like my mother.

“I disembarked in London shortly, and was dressed posh. This was just the beginning; I was open to learning as much as I could about this new world—as I sought answers to my questions. I worked in lots of homes and with many Londoners before I finally found my father.”

“Who was your father?” Franklin asked.

“Sir John Sheridan.”

He snapped his head up and was quiet for a moment. “Is he really your father? You need to be very certain, and only you can claim your birth right. He’s a significant aristocrat in the club, and commands the respect of people with a high party-political motivation. On a deeper consideration, it is likely that due to his absenteeism it would be harder to prove this issue. Particularly, because he hasn’t got a child and you will be his solitary heir. As far as I know him, he never married and has no issue.”

“Just because he was absent doesn’t change the fact—I am his daughter!”

“Would he confirm this if he was here right now?”

“He doesn’t know. I reached him to offer my help for exorcism.”

“So it is better to wait for him to return, then tell him about it.”

“I cannot wait, because I cannot allow carrying out of the malicious plans against my father.”

“What plans?”

“Doctor Lawrence plans to make use of his gore for a lengthier lifetime. He’s already injected my father’s blood into his body. I saw it with my eyes when I was hiding under my father’s bed in his chamber.”

“How did Doctor Lawrence do that?”

“He used a metal syringe when my father was under the effect of hypnosis and a drug. I stole a glass of medicine he prescribed but I do not know the contents.”

Franklin took a deep breath. “We should share this with Doctor Lawrence and ask for clarification.”

“It’s better not to. He’s a devil occupying a human body. He knows Sheridan’s family very well.”

“May I see the medicine?” He took the glass and opened the barrel, smelling it.

“Oh, this is laudanum,” he groaned.

“I’ve drunk a bit of it before. It had a very destructive effect on my mind, but gave me the ability to see the future. I saw myself, and even my children growing older, and later, their deaths. You can also try.”

“What? You’re asking me to take laudanum?”

“You really have no choice. Although, I think this drug is much stronger than laudanum, you will be surprised at what you will see. I hung a curtain in the corner of the room so you can see the shots in the curtain more obviously. Are you ready for the future?”

Sitting by the curtain, Franklin drank some of the potion. He began to descend into ecstasy, before starting a monologue by O’Brien.

O’Brien opened an old Bible and whispered verses from the Book of Revelation by Johannes with her soft voice.

Sometime later, Franklin returned to normal. “How did you do that?” he asked.

“What did you see?”

“A cloud of silvery plumage stemmed from the bottle, and extended and waved below me, surrounding and hypnotic. I slept like a child, held in my mother’s embrace. Then I woke up. It was a very grey day, with a most opaque sky. There was a hilly horizon; wild tulips and rocky peaks. I traced a road winding round the mountain. I remember descending a hill, to a desert, at twilight. There was complete pandemonium—everyone just panicked and running, remembering the Last Judgement. I saw mothers and children crying, surrounded by black snails, by white fangs. People with satanic emblems tattooed on their foreheads were in a bottomless pit that stunk of sulphur—a deplorable vision of hell.” Franklin stopped, and took a breath. “A gentleman, splendidly attired, alighted from a huge flying mechanism of steel and brass, a very huge flying cylinder, and I saw his very familiar face. Doctor Lawrence! The people of the hell were venerating him as if he was God, and he was dominating the flying objects in the sky and snails on the soil. Then some heavy clouds were swept from the sky by a rising wind. It started raining fire and stone from the galaxy and people were rushing everywhere to find a shelter. A cavalier with a name of God tattooed on his forehead rode towards Doctor Lawrence and killed him with a long Arabic yataghan and whipped the snails to sneak into their holes.

“All the rest was formless cloud and vacant depth, and it shuddered at the thought of tottering, and plunging amid that chaos. In this moment a gigantic aircraft arrived, as large as a flying city; people called it ‘New Jerusalem’”



“The sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood before the coming and the great day of the Lord,” O’Brien said with a tone of concern.

Franklin paused. The thoughts whirled in his mind. “May I smoke?”

O’Brien nodded.

Franklin lit his pipe. Having indulged a while in this sedative, he took the pipe from his lips, and while gazing steadily at the empty curtain, said very deliberately, “We can’t do anything.”

He again put his pipe to his lips, and renewed his smoking. “I need to know more. Please tell me what your plan is.”

“We have retrieved the key of the coffins. Now it is time to infiltrate Lawrence’s domestic where we would be able to find the Head of Baphomet.”

## Chapter VII

While Franklin was still sitting under the drowsy influence of the drug, they were startled by a knock at the door.

“Are you expecting company?” Franklin asked shiftily with round eyes.

“I think you have been followed. I begged you to be more vigilant,” said O’Brien, trying to see up the street over the dirty yellow blind on the low window. “I can’t see anyone.”

“Let me open the door,” said Franklin, and he did so.

A man came out of the shadows and appeared in the brightness of the room. It was Doctor Lawrence; his dark, haunted eyes staring out of his anaemic face.

Franklin was struck. “You? What’s happened, Doctor?”

Doctor Lawrence stepped inside and stretched out his hand, in which he held a crumpled map. “You forgot your map, Abraham; I bought this one from the cabman who is working round your office. It cost me a shilling in terms of money but a lot of time to find here,” he said.

“So you followed me. It is very vulgar and uncouth, sir.”

“In fact, the suspicious demeanour of you and your catholic cortege brought me here. I fuss over your health and I do not want to hurt you, my dear friend. If you really want to see where our misplaced friend is, I can aid you and bring you to him.”

“So, our supposition was correct and you abducted him, didn’t you?” O’Brien said, her face burning.

“I know you want to find Sir John alive, but I believe you harbour feelings of bitter resentment toward me. If you cooperate, you will see him.”

“We shan’t be with you in this case,” O’Brien replied and grabbed Franklin’s arm.

Mr Franklin gave his friend a perplexed look, and said, “I can’t believe you pardoned Doctor Lawrence of suspicion while he is assisting us.”

“I would show you where to find him tonight. Isn’t it what you want?” Doctor Lawrence asked O’Brien, his voice husky.

“Sorry, I think this is of no avail and I can’t accompany you,” O’Brien retorted.

“But I want to know where my friend is. I will come,” Franklin said as he gave his forehead a quick rub with his hand. He had a splitting headache, after taking laudanum.

“A growler is ready outside, which I will drive. Please don’t mess around,” Doctor Lawrence said, and then left the room. Mr Franklin followed him and got into the growler without bidding O’Brien farewell.

Doctor Lawrence drove the growler madly through the streets. The old driver crossed the river by Westminster Bridge to Astley’s and then to Lambeth, and parked near a derelict chapel off the main road, where semi-ravaged walls of a derelict chapel appeared. It was so dark. There was no moon, but a sky sparkling with stars.

Lawrence parked in the front yard, which was overgrown with nettles and statues of holy cherubs; they seemed alive among all the dust and debris.

“Do you trust me?” Doctor Lawrence asked with a grin as he dismounted the growler to guide the visitor inside the roofless nave. “Follow me!”

They entered, and Franklin saw the remainder of a chapel that had been abandoned for more than a decade and was utterly perished, covered with moss like a temple for mushrooms, and the only sound was the hooting of owls. Darkness engulfed Franklin. He stood hesitantly. “You brought me here to what, please describe. Tell me, where is Sheridan?” he asked.

“There is no one here, and I shall never forgive myself for having left my bedridden friend to his fate,” Doctor Lawrence moaned, and his face shone white in the darkness as he continued, “They know the fate.”

“Who do you mean by ‘them’?”

“According to the Torah’s description of creation, the nature of the human is a copy of these beings, who journeyed from Eden to Earth to spread their seeds on the soil of this planet, and they will return to human’s origins through holes in the sky.”

“I don’t understand even a word of your rambling, and I’m no longer interested. Tell me now where my friend is,” Franklin demanded.

“You’re nothing if not stupid. I am speaking of the secrets of creation,” Doctor Lawrence said, standing with his back to him. His hands were clasped behind him, and he seemed to be lost in thought.

“Who are you really, Doctor Lawrence?” Franklin asked in a muffled voice. “I saw you in my dreams...dreams of the future.”

Lawrence turned his head and looked over his shoulder at him. “I am Baron James Sheridan,” he said in a voice that brooked no denial.

“Baron James Sheridan?” Franklin repeated, suddenly pale-faced.

“Yes. I’m an explorer, and I’ve pushed into the little-known waters of Shona in Africa.”

“I haven’t heard of Shona.”

“Shona speakers in Africa I mean.”

“I have never been to Africa.”

Then Doctor Lawrence exposed his power of cinematic storytelling and continued, “Against all Portuguese colonists and Arab invaders, the Manyika tribe survived. They had repelled all invaders, but very soon they hosted late arrivals; the sky travellers.”

“Sky travellers?”

“Yes. They came with gigantic flying devices as big as cities. I saw how their flying devices helped the Manyika people erect their huge idols.”

“Oh, O’Brien told me something about the people of the moon, but I didn’t care,” Franklin muttered under his breath. “What happened to the Manyika?”

“Manyika people were weak and they couldn’t live with the sky travellers for a long while. They all died of an influenza pandemic, but my blood contains the codes of immortality so I wasn’t infected. Very soon though, other travellers were infected and the rest escaped. I tried to move some sick ones to England, but they all died before being disembarked of my frigate.”

“I can’t believe your story. You can’t have been living for more than three centuries.”

“But I learnt. I managed to survive, indeed, injecting my sons’ blood into my heart, applying probes and methods the sky travellers taught me.”

“This is preposterous, Doctor. Please let me go if Sheridan is not here.”

“Sheridan is not here, but you can’t go, Abraham.”

“Why?”

“Before you go, you have to pray before my little friend, lying prostrate. You must know who your God is.”

Abruptly, Doctor Lawrence started clapping. A diminutive, dark grey-skinned ape that was completely devoid of external organs, like a nose, ears, or genitals, appeared from the deep darkness and jumped onto the mossy altar. It had a small chest and lacked muscular definition and a visible skeletal structure. Its legs were short, and its head was large in proportion to its body.

“Say hello to my little friend,” Lawrence announced. Franklin stepped backward, feeling a surge of anxiety.

“I exhibited some specimens, though dead, at the courts, out of a yearning need to prove myself. No one believed me,” Lawrence said and then broke his short pause, “Now I leave you two alone. I am sure you will believe my words before too long. Don’t try to escape; my friend can freeze you still with a stare.”

“Please, Please don’t do that, please.” Franklin froze in horror, in an increasing frailty of a nasty fright. His voice shook as he pleaded. The ache in his head worsened. Then he felt a twinge in his knees.

The ape advanced—the stench of a spoiled fish following every step. Franklin knelt down in frustration. Lawrence was going to leave the scene when a scream stopped him.

“Don’t move,” O’Brien yelled from the darkness.

“I was so fast. How did you chase us?” Lawrence asked with astonishment.

O’Brien glared at the ape, her cheeks flushing. She grabbed an old navy Revolver out of her pocket. “You are a satanic soul, Baron. Don’t move, or I will kill you.”

“Shoot the ape, Shoot the ape!” Franklin demanded.

“Stay put unless you would see this pistol suddenly went off,” O’Brien cried.

“I don’t think that works,” Doctor Lawrence said and laughed drily.

“Alright, you made me check my old gun,” O’Brien said and shot Doctor Lawrence at once she stretched her hand. Lawrence fell to the ground. The ape escaped and vanished into the yard. Franklin stood up tiredly on his throbbing feet.

O’Brien stamped her feet by the corpse and her fingers explored his cloths and then his pockets of lounge jacket. She found his keys.

“What are you looking for? Is he still alive?” Franklin interrupted her as he stepped closer to the scene.

“My bullet has riddled his heart.”

“Oh, you in your infinite wisdom decided to kill him?” Franklin said with heavy irony.

“So what, wait and what, go and bring a lantern from the growler. Perhaps the ape is still around us.”

Franklin dragged his body on his numb feet towards the growler and took a lantern. Then they searched the whole area but all to no avail; the ape had disappeared.

“It is the time,” O’Brien shouted as a big idea struck her head.

“What time?”

“Let’s return to Ludgate and infiltrate into Lawrence’s house.”

“What about the corpse? We can’t leave him here. We should summon police.”

“The matters just get worse by calling police, don’t kill the time and let move to his house. I am sure his house is the centre of circle for his covert operations and we will find more clues. I hope the Head of Baphomet is there.”

## Chapter VIII

They reached Bailey Street before dawn, where flocks of starlings were busy on the roof ledges of a quaint old post office—feverishly sounding the alarms of a new morning. Franklin, on the other hand, was tired. He had an abysmal headache, and his vocabulary was altogether too limited to express his ruminations. “I have always thought William to have falsified his real identity, and now I’m convinced of his guilt. But I witnessed a murder committed with your gun—and now you’re on trial for his murder.”

“I did not feel a bit sorry for him,” O’Brien scoffed. “He was the victim of his own sinister mind.”

“I’ve had no sleep for a night. I must sleep soon,” Franklin remarked, letting out a sudden groan and leaning forward.

“Why don’t you take a little more laudanum again?” O’Brien suggested. That was the day Franklin must have learnt something about the rapid use O’Brien had made of his lack of confidence.

“If my headache lasts, I will have to do it as you prescribe.”

After they entered the dark house, O’Brien lit the dining-room lamp and entered room 33, where she had visited Doctor Lawrence for the first time. There was a massive map of London on the wall, right above a small study desk.

As O’Brien’s eyes wandered towards the items on the desk, she paused to take a better look at them. “Well, well, well,” she exclaimed, arms akimbo.

Franklin was still wandering around in the hall. He walked among the ancient gods, overwhelmed by their greatness and magnitude—as though he was nothing. “Did you find anything?” he asked, knuckling his eyes, as he followed his friend.

O’Brien managed to retrieve a few items, including a large metallic syringe and a golden key like the Key of Solomon.

“The syringe will be a good evidence for proving Doctor Lawrence’s guilt, but I’m not sure about this key,” she observed.

All of a sudden, Franklin saw a prism of light flash on the edge of the window glass. “What’s that? It seems to be a telescope.”

A set of prisms with big convex lenses was there, which served to magnify

distant images. Franklin tried to look through the eyepiece. "Oh, amazing!" he said with a smile.

"I can clearly see Ursa Minor and Polaris. They are very apparent," he continued keenly, but O'Brien displayed no concern or response.

"I'd rather glance through the volumes first," she said and handed the items leisurely and left the room toward the other rooms.

Franklin was busy manipulating the device when he thought the device was not set properly. He found a groove between the gears which was in the shape of a pentagon. An idea came to him, and he inserted the weird golden key which O'Brien found, into the pentagonal groove and turned it. The gears turned and adjusted, and consequently, the image of Ursa Minor reflected on the map of London on the front wall.

Franklin eagerly shouted and called his friend, "Come and watch this! Look, the places on the map are familiar addresses: Lincoln's Inn Fields where the Lady Somerset Galleria is placed, the British Museum which exhibits one coffin of Baron Sheridan's collection, Bond Street where The Ivory Club is located, and two others about Devonshire Terrace and Norfolk Street are perhaps the old chapels that burnt in the Great Fire."

"Yes, they are the places where coffins were found."

"And Polaris is reflected on the address of this house in Old Bailey Street," Franklin murmured.

"Polaris is the shiniest star in Ursa Minor," O'Brien muttered.

"There must be something special about this place, I suppose. But how can we know?" Franklin asked as again a deep headache came to him.

At this moment, the new sun dawned crisp and sharp which shone through the window, and the signs on the map abruptly disappeared.

The sparks of a new dawn which had flared within them, very soon were vanished by untimely daybreak. They had never remembered a morning so unsatisfactory, especially after the arduous incidents of the previous night.

Franklin was spitting with sudden fury, but he had no energy left to say anything other than, "I am going to have a nap." He then left to find a good sofa in the hall for a quick doze. He applied the prescription of his friend and in one



swallow, downed the laudanum left in the bottle and slept.

In his sweet dreams he was floating in the sky, buoyant and flimsy. He was very close to the stars, in fact, that he would have been able to catch them, to touch them and let them go again.

He saw eight stars, happy and bopping. They were following each other in a row but none exceeded the others. Together they formed a hexagon, bright, big and eternal, that was spinning in the dark sky.

Then one of them felt sick and went off suddenly. Because of this, the others began to flicker and become smothered. At this moment a new star appeared and came to the chain. Once again the other stars congealed in a hexagonal shape and started pinning around the centre.

When Franklin rose, it was about midday. He stood up dizzily and widened his eyes. He looked everywhere for his friend, crying her name but O'Brien had left the house. He soon sensed a surge of solitude and went to Room 33, having no purpose.

He was not thinking of all the odd coincidences that had proceeded this moment—a natural form of defence against high trauma—and thanks to his last sweet dream and laudanum, he was peaceful. He turned spontaneously toward the London map and was confronted by a very eerie scene. The map was torn and there was a big hole on the wall behind it.

For a moment he moved his feet quickly to do something, blood had been pumped into his head. He jumped on the desk below the hole and took a look inside. It was extremely dark; however, that he could see nothing, so he went down and took a lamp from the hall, then pulled himself up into the hole. He was very vexed with his friend, not concerned about any imminent hazard. Fortunately, there was a very long wooden ladder on the other side of the wall, but its lower rungs were lost in darkness. Still, Franklin thought, it must be a way down into the basement.

Franklin climbed down with shaking feet. Where the steps of the ladder ended, there was a small space. Blackness surrounded him.

“Oh, what’s this?” Franklin whispered to himself when he saw a small coffin very similar to the one he had seen before at The Ivory Club.

“I found it,” he muttered, thinking for a moment about whether there might

be something dangerous inside the coffin, and then anxiously brought a key out of his pocket. It was the red key they had found in Sheridan's library—a long rusty key.

He inserted the corroded key and turned it with all the power of his wrist. The key clicked but before finishing its duty broke into two pieces, leaving one end in Franklin's hand. "Damn it!" Franklin shouted, staring at the key, surprised. Then he squatted down in front of the coffin to find an answer.

"O'Brien must have been here, I am sure," Franklin murmured to himself, "And she has done something with this coffin. Perhaps another key exists; one which O'Brien found in this house and used to open the coffin and then lock it again—a certified replica of Sheridan's antique key."

He saw a book on the floor that he hadn't noticed before. It was a hefty Zohar, like the one they had found in Sheridan's study. Inside the book was a groove, providing a place to hide something. "Aha, this proves that there is another copy of my key, again inside a Zohar!" Franklin cried.

Flickering through the book he found a piece of paper, with this message, "Find me at Sheridan's mansion, and please don't be late!"

## Chapter IX

Franklin walked staggered around the house plagued by the vision of dancing stars. A cloud of sneaking suspicion continued to hang over his laudanum-laced mind that O'Brien did not tell the whole truth and left him alone to continue the investigation on her own; that she had been accused of Doctor Lawrence's murder, troubled his conscious. He felt guilty about that. The shreds of evidence they gathered suggested the kidnapping nothing more than ordinary.

He bolt from the house, flagged a cab, and paid half-a-crown for a flying travel to Kennington Lane. Upon reaching the entrance, he ran through the dishevelled gardens to Sheridan's door. After several intermittent knocks, the door slowly opened—the hinges' groan echoing off the entry walls compounding the spectre greeting him.

Eyes and mouth wide with shock, he stuttered, "Is that you, Doctor Lawrence? I thought you had died; you got shot in the heart, for Christ's sake. I watched you bleed out!" Franklin wondered if the laudanum was making him hallucinate.

"Yes, that was a near-death experience, my dear fellow, but you know, my grey friends have succeeded in resurrecting my life. They were invisible to you, but they resuscitated me after you were gone."

Franklin was shocked. A dead man had been made alive? Maybe it was the drug that allowed Franklin to quickly recover from this fright.

"Now I should ask for two of my friends, Sir John and O'Brien as well," he claimed with a shaking voice.

"Don't worry. They are alive but sleeping deeply. You can see them in our small attic bedroom. I have established a hospital there."

They entered the house. There was no sign of Pickens, the only house staff.

"Where is Pickens?" Franklin asked.

"He is dismissed."

"But he was fully committed!" Franklin demanded more information.

"He was so committed and such a prier too! I sacked him on behalf of my friend."

On listening to this, Franklin didn't inquire more but imagined a bad fortune that has befallen on Pickens.

Baron led Franklin upstairs. Panting from the steep climb and feeling light-headed, they reached to the attic. They saw slight scorch marks on the floor, perhaps on account of being in contact with high heat.

"What are these burn marks?" Franklin asked.

Baron thought for a moment and, though it wasn't readable on his face if he actually wanted to answer or retreat, said, not looking into his questioner's eyes, "When people are stargazing, they stare at stars and many other things which they've already presumed commonly are stars but are indeed different worlds. You know, when different worlds get closer, many things might happen."

Baron opened the attic where some patients were lying on eight beds in the shape of an octagon. Both men and women were naked; in a supine position, and a vessel of blood connected the carotid artery of each one to the other.

A pump seemed to mingle the gore in accordance with a device that controlled their respiratory rate. They were all sleeping serenely and living in concord with one another.

Franklin stepped closer. "Oh, they are the family of Sheridan, I know. Leister, Malcolm, Alfred, George, Benedict, Henry, and John Sheridan," he said with a measured cadence and continued after a small pause, "And this one, oh, O'Brien is sleeping here!"

"She is the only daughter of the dynasty of mine, a morning star born in the black sky," Baron explained.

"A morning star," Franklin repeated as he thought of his spooky dream about dancing stars.

"So she is the only kinswoman of the family, isn't she?"

"Yes, her name's Ingrid. She was born in Ireland as an unsolicited child of an unregistered marriage. She had lived an atrocious life when she was abducted by the people of the moon for the first time at the age of fifteen. She can't remember any of that anyway. She may say something about being kept in a nunnery which she had never been in, though in the other term. She is merely remembering the inoculated memories in her mind. That isn't the start for applying Sheridan's blood but a start for finding a substitute while I am living in

the public.”

“Poor girl!” Franklin exposed a sense of compassion. “But she introduced herself as a seeker of the truth rather than a laboratory mouse. What’s her role really?”

“She is John’s daughter and has got eternal codes, which helps the cycle of my grandchildren’s blood in my absence. Good blood always shows itself. Yes, blood will have blood, I do agree. I have been thirsty for my own blood and I fill myself with it. I needed her but no more and I want to cut off the vessels and sleep in my occupied bed.”

“And how would she respond to that?”

“She will be returned but not remember any of before. It’s not her first experience of that so I don’t think she will hurt,” Baron responded.

Franklin was amazed. The family of Sheridan slept peacefully in a set of devices with blood circulating from body to body. He had finally managed to find his friend alive but, rather than being the story’s end, this discovery seemed to have started another chapter.

“Who are you really, Baron James Sheridan?” Franklin muttered, almost to himself.

“Who am I?” Baron repeated with a cry of scorn and then said, “The question is who are you, my dear friend? The moon does it all the time. Everyone is a moon, and has a dark side which he never shows to anyone. We are all the people of the moon indeed. It’s time to finish our nightmares.”

Franklin was frozen in silence, but he was determined to elicit a reply from Baron, so he asked his question another way; “I need to know more. I saw sign thirty-three on the door of your office—the highest rank of a master mason—as well as the influence of *The Rosy Cross* within this house. Are your grandchildren Shriners? If I were in a paranormal investigative kind of mood, I would ask who had liaised between you and *The Rosy Cross Brotherhood*.”

“Your answer is one name, Robert Fludd, my close friend and an enthusiastic apologist of the *Rosy Cross*. We have been discussing a lot of occult philosophy since I told him the story of Manyika and the head of Baphomet. He showed lots of interest and established a ritual in which we tried to summon the Space Travellers here again to London, and to pact with them for an infinite life.

I sacrificed my body and gained an endless knowledge.”

Then Baron sneered and asked with a dissenting voice, “Still, it is impossible for me to understand why you are pursuing this case. Did you find any clues at my house?”

“Yes, I found a coffin in the basement,” Franklin responded directly.

“What was in it?” Baron cried.

“In fact, my key broke into two pieces when I tried to open it,” said Franklin, bringing out from his pocket the broken part of the red key.

Baron gave a loud, mindless laugh as he watched Franklin posture, “This is the end of your story Abraham, game over!” and then drew a small pistol out of his pocket. “Now you know too much about me and must be eliminated, poor pawn.”

Suddenly a scream was heard from O’Brien as if she had not been insentient at all. She woke up and made a grab at the broken part of the old key of the coffins, and stabbed Baron in the carotid artery three times, yelling, “Die, die, die!”

Blood went everywhere, steaming from Baron’s throat. O’Brien stood up with her naked body—bloodied and battered. Franklin fell over the ground. “Are you alive?” he said in fear.

“Yes, unfortunately.”

Franklin stood up with shaking legs, “I’m happy you’re healthy and pardon for my delay. What did you find inside the coffin at Lawrence’s house?”

“That was empty but I thought we had still a good bit of a start, as I reasoned, it would take place in Sheridan’s mansion by finding another coffin. So, I came here and found Baron alive,” O’Brien answered and turned to Baron’s half dead body and said, “What should we do with this murderer?”

Franklin noticed some arithmetic changes in the respiratory system of the other ancestors, and some warning signs of the modern controlling devices caught his attention. “Look, perhaps there is a problem with this device and the patients can’t breathe easily?”

“Oh, my father,” O’Brien said and touched her father’s cold hands. “We must do something.”

Franklin thought for a moment and answered, “It is easy to understand the device as it works as a circulator of the blood from body to body and now one bed is empty.” Then he turned to the Baron and said, “He is still alive! The eternal codes!”

Then both of them helped each other to put the Baron on his bed and connected the vessels into his artery. The system calmed down and the patients felt better. Franklin went and brought some cloths for his friend.

Not a moment or two passed since the last trouble when another one seemed to come around. The sky turned dark and a massive vertex of wind started to blow over the mansion. It was so strong, as though it could blow the roof off like a hat from a head.

“What’s happening outside?” Franklin shouted.

“It’s a storm,” O’Brien said in answer.

“But now? In May? And in London?”

The roof was taken by the storm finally, at least from that part of the house. Two detectives fell over the ground and sought a place to survive it. In their amazement there was no storm anywhere else than over the mansion, and the sky was dark because of a huge flying disc over the roof which was as big as the mansion itself.

A very dazzlingly bright ray came through the roof from the flying disc and shone on the set of beds. It became brighter and brighter until it was not possible to see anything.

Then lastly, everything became silent and the storm finished as it wasn’t stormy at all. The set of patients disappeared.